

David at Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board CareerWorks Healthcare Training Institute

This is the story of David Goines, a formerly unemployed, African American, older adult male and a 2012 graduate of the Community Health Worker training program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This program, coordinated by the Milwaukee Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) in partnership with the CareerWorks Healthcare Training Institute (HTI), is an innovative workforce development program implemented to support the emerging profession of Community Health Worker (CHW). CareerWorks HTI is supported by the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

David graduated from Milwaukee High School of the Arts and entered the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM) to pursue a degree in Nursing. According to David, he started out as a strong student but then got sidetracked, hanging out with the "wrong people" and making "poor decisions." As a result, he dropped out of UWM, became unproductive, and even had a "brush" with the law. He soon realized that he had to change his life, "get focused and let go of the foolishness," or be homeless or incarcerated, neither of which was a path he wanted to take. David got a job as an Administrative Assistant at Quad Graphics, a local manufacturing company, where he worked for almost a decade.

In 2007, David became unemployed when the recession caused the company to downsize and eliminate his position. For the next year, he was unemployed and lived off his 401(k) and his savings, which soon dried up. David knew he now had to choose a positive direction for his life and find employment to survive. He explored options for returning to school, and his strong interest in healthcare led him to Sanford Brown to pursue a career as a Medical Assistant, combining his experience in administrative services with his interest in healthcare. David graduated from Sanford Brown with an Associate Degree in Applied Medical Science.

While at Sanford Brown, David participated in an externship with Columbia St. Mary's (CSM) Hospital in its Chronic Disease Clinic. He was once again inspired and motivated by the healthcare environment and the opportunity to serve patients. David was referred to HTI and AHEC by another CHW at the hospital, Christy, who had also graduated from the CHW training program. He says, "Christy told me that she recognized my positive engagement with patients and suggested that I might be a good CHW."

David enrolled in the CHW training program and was a star trainee. He had a perfect attendance record for the eight-week program, and he achieved a score of 96% on his final exam, a significant increase from a score of 22% on his pre-exam. While in training, David completed volunteer hours well above the requirement. He was the program's resident Medical Assistant, often coming to class with his blood pressure cuff and stethoscope, taking the blood pressure of his classmates and offering self-management strategies to those with elevated levels, the true mark of a CHW.

Asked to speak at the CHW graduation, David said, “When I signed up for the program I saw it as a supplement to my clinical experience and offered reinforcement methods for providing good patient care. With my first exam results, I was uncertain about my success probability in the program. As the course proceeded, I found myself surrounded by positive peers, very engaging speakers, and interesting discussions on a variety of subjects. I found myself absorbing interesting information, increasing my vocabulary, and developing skills to make me an effective Community Health Worker. I’m glad I decided to stick with the program and can’t wait to use my skills to assist those who need help.”

David’s past brush with the law would have barred him from an opportunity to work in healthcare in most circumstances. However, the partnership and common goals of Milwaukee AHEC, CSM, and HTI, along with the flexibility of the Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) options and David’s externship performance, provided a lens through which David was viewed as an ideal candidate for the CHW position that CSM was seeking to fill. David was hired by CSM in a nontraditional position, Community Health Worker/Medical Assistant, a community/clinical employment role. He says he is happy and fulfilled by the work he does and is grateful for the opportunity. CSM is to be commended on its innovative workforce strategy and the opportunity it provided for David.